

St. Cloud VA

UPDATE

March 19, 2021



A monthly newsletter for Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA Health Care System, and for those who serve them. Send news items and comments to St. Cloud VA Health Care System, Attn: Public Affairs Officer, 4801 Veterans Drive, St. Cloud, MN 56303, or via email to barry.venable@va.gov

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

In Brief:

- *Including clinics scheduled through Saturday, March 20, we will have provided more than 19,000 doses of vaccine. More than 7,000 Veterans are now fully vaccinated with first and second doses.*
- *All enrolled Veterans may now schedule a vaccine appointment.*
- *If you have been vaccinated outside of VA, please contact your PACT or send them a secure message to let us know.*
- *Tune into our weekly vaccine video updates at [Facebook page](#).*

All Veterans are encouraged to get vaccinated!

All enrolled Veterans served by the St. Cloud VA HCS may schedule their COVID-19 vaccination appointments by calling 320-252-1670 and selecting option 8. Veterans may also indicate their interest in getting a

vaccine by filling out the vaccine interest form at: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/stay-informed>.

Vaccine appointments are available at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, or at VA clinics in Alexandria, Brainerd and Montevideo.

Vaccine supplies remain limited, and we continue to provide vaccinations at specific locations and times. We are offering vaccination appointments to match our projected vaccine supply at the time. Vaccination in conjunction with other medical appointments is not currently available.

Help us keep our records updated!

We are working to include information on vaccines received outside of VA into our Veteran's medical records. If you have been vaccinated outside of VA, please contact your PACT or send them a secure message to let us know.

Stay safe!

Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools we have available and getting vaccinated is one way you can do your part.

Wearing masks and social distancing help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, but these measures are not enough. Vaccines work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed.

The combination of getting vaccinated and following CDC's recommendations to protect yourself and others offer the best protection from COVID-19.

To receive a vaccine at the St. Cloud VA you must be a Veteran enrolled and eligible for VA health care benefits. If you are a Veteran that is interested in receiving care at the VA but are not yet enrolled, please [apply for VA health care online](#) or call 320-255-6340.

Copay Billing Update

After pausing debt collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, VA was scheduled to resume billing for VA copay debt in January 2021. On Jan. 22, 2021 President Biden signed an Executive Order delaying debt collection from Veterans.

Due to recently passed legislation in March 2021, copayments for medical care and pharmacy services provided by VHA during the period of April 6, 2020 through September 30, 2021 will be canceled. All copayments paid to VA for medical care and prescriptions for the period of April 6, 2020 to present will be refunded.

While implementing regulations are in development, Veterans are advised to NOT pay a VA copay bill for services from April 6, 2020 to present.

CPAC staff at the St. Cloud VA can print out a current VA account summary for Veterans. This can be printed at the CPAC Customer Service point for VA billing questions from 9-Noon in the Building 5 (Pharmacy) area, Mon – Thurs., or via phone at (320-255-6384), or attached to secure messages.

Coffee Talks

Coffee Talks are informal conversations intended to provide Veterans an opportunity to have their questions about VA health care answered.

Coffee Talks

Apr. 9, May 14, and June 11
2021

2—4 p.m.

St. Cloud VAMC

Bldg. 29, Rm. 20E



Topics to be covered:

- *Enroll for health care*
- *VA health care benefits*
- *Using VA health services*
- *VA wellness programs*
- *Get started on your Whole Health journey*

To attend in-person call the Health Hub at 320-252-1670 ext. 7271 to reserve a spot!

Limit 6 for in-person attendance, reservations are required.

Not able to attend in person? A Call-in phone line is available:

Call 1-800-767-1750, Code 11242#

Not enrolled?

- Learn how to apply for VA health care.
- Bring your DD214!



VA health care enrollment provides valuable benefits to Veterans and their families. Non-enrolled Veterans, Veterans new to the VA health care system, and enrolled Veterans who want to learn how to most effectively use VA systems of care are encouraged to attend a Coffee Talk.

National Vietnam War Veterans Day, March 29

National Vietnam War Veterans Day unites Americans to thank and honor Vietnam Veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice.

[The Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017](#) was signed into law by 45th U.S. President Donald J. Trump, designating every March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day.

This special day joins six other military-centric annual observances codified in [Title 4 of the United States Code §6](#) (i.e., Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day, Navy Day, Veterans Day).

March 29 is a fitting choice for a day honoring Vietnam Veterans. It was chosen to be observed in perpetuity as March 29, 1973 was the day United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam was disestablished, and the day the last U.S. combat troops departed Vietnam. In addition, on and around this same day Hanoi released the last of its acknowledged prisoners of war.

[The United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration](#) honors all veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time from [November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975, regardless of location](#).

November 1, 1955 was selected to coincide with the official designation of Military Assistance Advisory Group-Vietnam (MAAG-V); May 15, 1975 marks the end of the battle precipitated by the seizure of the SS Mayaguez.

VA estimates that today there are more than 6 million U.S. Vietnam Veterans living in America and abroad, along with 9 million families of those who served during this timeframe.

S.A.V.E. Suicide Prevention Training & Safe Messaging

The Central Minnesota Suicide Prevention Coalition is offering S.A.V.E. Suicide Prevention Training & Safe Messaging learning opportunities. For more information visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/145758211735>.



S.A.V.E. Suicide Prevention Training & Safe Messaging

Presented By: Laura Kunstleben, BSN MS

Laura Kunstleben, BSN MS is the Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator (CEPC) at the St. Cloud Veterans Administration Medical Center. She has been with the St. Cloud VAMC since 2007 and has been the CEPC since March 2018. She is considered a suicide prevention expert and has been building community suicide prevention coalitions within the 27 counties the St. Cloud VA covers.

YOU'RE INVITED ~ PLEASE JOIN US OVER YOUR LUNCH FOR THIS INFORMATIONAL SESSION!

Three Opportunities To Join Us:

- March 23rd, 11am-12pm
- April 7th, 12-1pm
- April 19th, 11am-12pm

Location: Online via Zoom

Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/145758211735>

ATTENDEES WILL LEARN:

- A general understanding of the scope of suicide in the US;
- Myths and facts about suicide;
- **SIGNS** of someone thinking about suicide;
- How to **ASK** questions;
- **VALIDATE** the person's feelings;
- **ENCOURAGE/EXPEDITE** getting help; and
- What Safe Messaging & Reporting means and why it matters

Training is brought to you by: The Central Minnesota Suicide Prevention Coalition
For more information about our coalition or on how YOU can get involved, please email: CentralMNSuicPreCoalition@gmail.com

End suicide by Empowering, Educating, Equipping, and Engaging the Community

Accessing COVID-19 Test Results on My HealtheVet

[Accessing COVID-19 Test Results on My HealtheVet - YouTube](#)

VA Holding Virtual Listening Sessions to Hear from Veterans about the Future of VA Health Care

VA is hosting public virtual listening sessions to hear from Veterans on how to design a health care system of the future and grow services for Veterans in a way that reinforces VA's role as a leader in the U.S. health care system. Minnesota's listening session is scheduled for April 8, 2021, from 2 to 4 p.m.

We are looking forward to robust engagement and to hearing the voices and insights of Veterans on the following topics:

- How Veterans want care to be delivered in the future
- Perception of the quality of health care at VA and VA's community network
- Experience with the ability to get care at VA and within VA's community network
- Satisfaction with the condition and location of VA's facilities
- VA's role in research, education, and emergency preparedness

These listening sessions represent an exciting opportunity for Veterans to help VA reimagine how VA delivers care in an equitable, high quality, Veteran-centered manner and develop a plan for investing in VA's aging infrastructure. The feedback will

be used to develop the recommendations VA submits to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission in January 2022. The AIR Commission will also conduct public hearings as part of their review of VA's recommendations before submitting its recommendations to the President and Congress for review and approval in 2023.

Listening sessions will run from March through June 2021 across the nation and will be hosted on a virtual technology platform to permit participation via phone or computer. We encourage Veterans, Veterans Service Organizations, Community Veterans Engagement Boards, and other interested stakeholders to attend. For more information about the listening sessions, please visit

<https://www.va.gov/HEALTHPOLICYPLANNING/listening.asp>. If you are not able to attend the meeting but would like to provide feedback, you may submit your thoughts on the topics outlined above to VHAMAQs@va.gov. As a reminder, please do not include personal health information in your submission. Also, be aware that VA will not respond to individual emails.

AARP, others offer free tax prep help to Veterans, military and families

As we inch closer to the April 15 tax deadline, AARP Foundation's Tax-Aide is among the programs aimed at helping the military community and others file their state and federal tax returns. Tax-Aide is free and available (appointment only) to all Veterans, military personnel and their families regardless of age or whether they are AARP members.

“In this new environment of COVID, Tax-Aide has instituted a range of tax preparation assistance models that can help Veterans, those currently in the military and others,” said Lynnette Lee-Villanueva, vice president and national director of AARP Foundation Tax-Aide. “From safely delivered in-person service, virtual assistance and hybrid options – we are here to help.”

The nationwide tax help program is geared toward people 50 and older or those who have low to moderate incomes, but Tax-Aide is open to anyone free of charge. AARP membership isn’t required to take advantage of Tax-Aide’s knowledgeable volunteers, nor will there be any sales pitch for other services.

If you’d like to look for an appointment to receive tax filing assistance from AARP Foundation’s Tax-Aide, [click here to get started](#).

Due to the pandemic, Tax-Aide availability is limited this year. Other programs offering [free tax help](#) include Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE), Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), IRS Free File and MilTax.

In addition, here is some helpful information specifically for military Veterans from CPA and tax expert Lisa Greene-Lewis of TurboTax. [See the rest of her tax advice for military Veterans on aarp.org here](#).

VA payments exempt from federal taxes:

- VA education benefit payments.
- VA disability payments.
- Interest from VA life insurance policies.

- Benefits under a dependent-care assistance program.
- Money paid to a survivor of a member of the armed forces who died after Sept. 10, 2001.
- Payments made under the compensated work therapy program.
- Any bonus pay from a state, county, city or town because of service in a combat zone.

Fast facts on state taxes:

- States typically offer tax benefits only to Veterans who were honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances from active duty.
- State benefits usually include some form of exemptions on property taxes, according to value.
- Benefits are often transferred over to a spouse or surviving spouse of honorably discharged Veterans.
- Many states include additional benefits for Veterans who are disabled.
- Every state’s revenue website outlines state benefits for Veterans and how to apply for them.

[Bookmark the Veterans, Military and Their Families page on aarp.org](#) to stay up to date with the latest news and information affecting older Veterans at [aarp.org/veterans](#). AARP resources for Veterans are free and available to nonmembers.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Veterans Affairs Radio Show

Monday, April 5 8:10-8:30 a.m.
KNSI AM 1450/FM 103.3

Coffee Talks

Friday, April 9 2-4 p.m.
St. Cloud VA, Bldg. 29, Rm. 20E, or virtually
Coffee Talks are informal conversations
intended to provide Veterans an

opportunity to have their questions about
VA health care answered.

To attend, call the Health Hub at 320-252-
1670 ext. 7271 to reserve a spot! Limit 6 for
in-person attendance, reservations are
required.

Voices for Veterans Radio Show

Wednesday, April 21 8-8:30 a.m.
WJON AM 1240

For a complete Calendar of Events, go to
<https://www.stcloud.va.gov/calendar.asp>



Quick Reference Phone List

Main St. Cloud VA HCS Phone Number	320-252-1670 or 800-247-1739
TDD User	320-255-6450
Max J. Beilke VA Clinic, Alexandria	320-759-2640
Brainerd VA Clinic	218-855-1115
Montevideo VA Clinic	320-269-2222
Veterans Crisis Line	800-273-8255 Press 1
Homeless Veteran Hotline	877- 424-3838

Billing:

• VA Care	866-347-2352
• Care in the Community (non-VA care)	877-881-7618
Caregiver Support Team	Ext. 7283
Chaplain Service	Ext. 6386
Community Care Referrals	Ext. 6401
Discrimination Complaints	Ext. 6304
Eligibility	Ext. 6340
Nutrition Clinic	Ext. 6376
Transition & Care Management Program	Ext. 6453
Patient Advocate	Ext. 6353
Pharmacy Refill Line	855-560-1724
Privacy Officer	Ext. 6408
Public Affairs Office	Ext. 6353
Release of Information (Medical Records)	Ext. 6336
Transportation	Ext. 7622
TRICARE	844-866-9378
Voluntary Service	Ext. 6365
VA Police	Ext. 6355

Stay in Touch

Visit our Website: www.stcloud.va.gov

Like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/StCloudVAHCS

Visit us on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/stcloudvahcs/>

Sign up for our automated email service. Visit the St. Cloud VA Website at: <http://www.stcloud.va.gov> and on the right-hand side of the page is a request to sign up for email updates. Enter your email address and you are automatically signed up to receive email updates from our web page.